

2013 Male Champions of Change Business Forum

Mike Smith
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Many thanks Leigh.

I know many people here today were incredibly pleased to learn you had agreed to be our MC and to moderate our panel.

Having deftly managed to avoid the 7.30 Report for six years now, I was thrilled to learn that my duties did not include being a panellist!

However, I know my fellow Male Champions are looking forward to your formidable questioning on today's topic.

My role today, on behalf of all the Male Champions, is to welcome you all here and to officially launch our Group's second report.

This is a very distinguished audience and it reflects the seriousness with which many leaders in business, in government and in education and in the not-for-profit sector are looking at this issue. We thank you all for your time, your interest and your commitment to change.

In particular, I'd like to welcome:

- The Federal Treasurer, Joe Hockey;
- Michaelia Cash, the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women;
- their Ministerial colleagues; and
- members of the Shadow Ministry who are also here today.

As you can imagine, I never saw myself participating in a "self-help" group on any issue.... many of my colleagues would feel the same way.

But that is kind of what the Male Champions of Change has been for usminus the group hugs.

The analogy of a self-help group isn't a bad one.

We came together back in 2010 because collectively we knew we had an issue. We had known this for some time, and were frustrated by our lack of progress in achieving gender balance in our organisations.

Our first report talked about what we had done and where we needed to go.

We have all seen the numbers. We have all read the research. We have all voiced our opinion.

Then and now, the facts speak for themselves. They tell us clearly, that an intervention is required.

Today, we are proposing a Leadership intervention.

This occurred for us over 2012 and it hasn't been plain sailing. We started by engaging with leading organisations such as Chief Executive Women and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

But the real jolt for us came through discussions with hundreds of women and men at all levels of our organisations. They helped us to understand what was stalling progress – sometimes in confronting detail.

Then, spending time with peers sharing what we'd learned, brought a greater and more focussed understanding of the issues. And what we could do to help accelerate change.

Like all good 'self-help' programs, we developed an action plan. A 12 point plan as it turns out – which is outlined in the early pages of the report.

As a quick aside, you won't hear any of us here today talking about the "why?"

We've all heard the many reasons put forward, we've looked at world research, and we've heard and participated in the debate over years - even decades.

But, I do think it is interesting that I seem to meet more senior women in business and politics in the developing world and especially in East Asia.

I won't touch on the various cultural, political and economic drivers of this – as you'd expect, they vary greatly from country to country.

However, one common driver might be the greater pragmatism, agility and innovation, which more acute economic need tends to create.

So let's take the 'why' as a given and have a look at our 2013 report.

I hope you will all be pleased to know that rather than more talk, it's about the action we have taken. It also recommends a set of simple, interconnecting actions we can all take, to advance more women into leadership.

I want to quickly touch on the "Creating Accountability" recommendations – Chapter 2 in the report.

This is something that Elmer Funke Kupper, Martin Parkinson, Stephen Fitzgerald and I worked on together.

We believe that the Enhanced Reporting, Plus One Pledge and Supplier Multiplier initiatives, widely adopted over time, will drive structural change.

It's fair to say that people like me and my MCC peers are a pretty competitive bunch.

The new gender reporting standard we established will ensure we're all keeping an eye on each other's progress and responding to what works. It's consistent, transparent and more granular.

Around 14 of our organisations will adopt this new approach and ASX, Telstra, CBA and ANZ have already done so for the 2013 reporting year.

The approach is also reflected in enhancements proposed as part of a review of the ASX Corporate Governance principles that is currently underway.

Transparency and competition will help drive change.

Next, the Plus One initiatives will see managers across our organisations add at least one woman to their teams as roles arise; and if not, we'll be asking "why not?"

This pragmatic, seemingly small step, applied by us all will again drive real change. It engages leaders to make sure they are consciously considering the best female talent for new roles as they arise.

We introduced the "Plus One Pledge" at ANZ earlier this year and I am pleased to say that we can see a real shift starting. 2,000 leaders pledged their support in the first six months.

Lastly, the Supplier Multiplier commitment - this is perhaps the most significant.

The companies and public sector entities that worked on this idea spend billions of dollars every year buying everything from an Airbus A380, plant & machinery, to uniforms, to simple stationary.

When the companies purchasing these goods start a conversation about gender balance, suppliers listen.

While Elmer, Stephen, Martin and I are bankers and economists, we know this is not just a numbers game.

What's critical here is engaging our leaders, our people and our suppliers - demonstrating and demanding the inherent strength and benefits we know comes from diverse teams.

This is just a snapshot of the work we are doing.

The panel discussion which follows will cover more of the issues and the actions we have taken.

Like any serious intervention, all of us have had our epiphanies as part of this process. Mine, was identifying the Leadership Lottery that exists in many of our organisations.

This was a phrase we coined to reflect the fact that sometimes, the career trajectory of talented women can rest entirely on their leader, be they male or female.

Women told us they tended to excel with leaders who demonstrate strong values; are inclusive; and supportive during the various stages of their life and career.

Conversely, too many described how their career stalled when a great leader moved on, *or they* moved on to one who was not so great.

It strikes me that we need to celebrate men who have a track record of hiring, developing and advancing women – but actually these men are quite rare.

Making inclusive leaders the norm rather than the exception – be they men or women - might just be the circuit breaker we need on this issue.

I want to close by saying that as a Group, our focus is on making real progress within our organisations and together to achieve meaningful change.

On behalf of the Male Champions of Change, I would like to recognise and to thank Elizabeth Broderick – our convenor and advisor.

Liz has managed all of us with strength, intelligence, determination and with diplomatic elegance. We are very lucky to have her and we have all learned a great deal from her.

Finally – none of us want to say again “this is going to take time”. We have all said this enough. We hope the practical, inter-connected and non-regulated actions in the report will inspire you and accelerate the pace of change.

Ideally, our next report will feature the progress and results achieved by thousands of Champions of Change - Australian leaders who acted together so that our country can reap the productivity and innovation advantage that we know diversity delivers.

Many thanks.